

## Past Perspectives October 2013

### Arts & Crafts Festival

The Bella Vista Arts & Crafts Festival as we know it today, to be held in October 17-19 this year, has been produced by the Village Art Club since 1969. Even before then, however, local artists were active with shows and festivals.

In the 1950's, artists in the area formed a group called the Bella Vista Fine Arts Center. They met in the Sunset Hotel, and later exhibited their art at a Spring Open House in the Hill and Dale Restaurant building (which many people knew as the "Dance Pavilion") on the east side of Lake Bella Vista.

In the March 1966 issue of the Village Vista, the Center announced "*a program of cultural activities, starting on May 28 and running into early September.*" Included was the "*...third annual Folk Arts and Crafts Workshop, and Festival, scheduled during June 24, 25 and 26...and the annual Juried Arts Show...August 14-28.*" The Center president that year was Mrs. Florence Rubert Wray of Fayetteville, and assisting her were Board members from the area and surrounding states, including John Cooper Jr. of Bella Vista. (John Cooper Jr. was later instrumental in helping the Village Art Club get the land and building donated for their Wishing Spring Gallery. At their January 2013 meeting, held just two days after his death, the club voted to rename one of their art scholarships in his honor.)

The July 1967 issue of the Village Vista reported, "*The Bella Vista Art Show of 1966 drew a record crowd of visitors from all states and several foreign countries. With the thousands of people visiting Bella Vista Village this year, attendance is expected to be much larger.*"

Gilbert Fite reported on the festival's history in his book, From Vision to Reality: A History of Bella Vista Village 1915–1993, that "*...as an outgrowth of the Bella Vista Fine Arts Center...the Village Art Club, organized in 1966 by 22 members from the Village and surrounding communities, emerged as one of Bella Vista's leading organizations....One of the club's main activities was sponsoring exhibitions and shows. The first Arts & Crafts Festival was held in the fall of 1969. Sponsored by the Art Club and the POA, it was held in a tent north of the dam...(near) the camping area along the creek.*"

The camping area, located west of what is now the soccer fields, was eventually moved about a mile east and became the Blowing Springs RV Park. The Arts & Crafts Festival was moved in 1973 to Blowing Springs Park, and as it continued to outgrow its space, it was moved in 1993 to its present location just south of the junction of Highways 340 & 279. It is held every year on the third weekend of October to coincide with the other arts & crafts festivals held all over northwest Arkansas. As stated on the <http://nwacraftfairs.com> website, it "...has grown to become the premier festival in the area and now includes 325 booths, all showing hand-made work....No imported or manufactured goods are allowed."

*Lucas is a docent at the Bella Vista Historical Museum, located next to the American Legion at the corner of 71 and Kingsland.*



From 1973 through 1992, the Arts & Crafts Festival was held at Blowing Springs Park.